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# Rob Simmons: Young Man with a Penchant for 'Blood and Thunder' Turns to the Quiet Life

By DEBORAH FITTS

STONINGTON — If it hadn't been for the Vietnam War, Robert Ruhl Simmons might well have become a journalist, and then he would have missed coming in out of the cold as a CIA spy and exchanging that for the fierce heat of battle on Capitol Hill.

Now the battles too are behind him: he resigned two weeks ago as chief of staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee in favor of a return to his Stonington roots and a period of relative tranquility.

"I decided with two young children and family and friends in Stonington that maybe it was time to come home," says Simmons, at ease in the study of his Broad Street house in the Borough. Near him are tidy stacks of pictures still to be hung and things to be put away, including a large photo of Sen. Barry Goldwater inscribed "For Rob — a real helper in a tough job," and an American flag in a box.

Simmons left his post amid a glow of praise both from the Senate, which sprang a surprise resolution of commendation on him Jan. 31, and from CIA director William Casey, who awarded him the agency's coveted medallion the following day.

The ceremonies of these two traditional adversaries — appropriately, one behind closed doors with members of the intelligence community in attendance and the other in the full light of the Senate chamber — not only point up Simmons' success but symbolize the course of his whole career in intelligence — first on the cloak-and-dagger side, and then in oversight.

## A Natural Choice

If the Vietnam War hadn't gobbled him up Simmons might have pursued a career in journalism, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, publisher of the Medford (Ore.) Mail Tribune. His career instead in intelligence was still a natural, he says, because he grew up with a profound interest in "finding the facts of the matter and conveying them as honestly and as clearly as I could."

As chief of staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee for the past three years, Simmons rode herd on 50 employees plus another 15 consultants, operating on a \$2 million annual budget and enabling the committee's 15 senators to oversee the entire national intelligence community.

The committee's biggest crisis came last April, when the senators and the CIA were at each other's throats over the discovery that the agency had secretly masterminded the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and launched other assaults against the country's Marxist Sandinista government.

"When you consider our country had diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, it represented a very serious violation of international law," says Simmons. "The U.S. was directly involved in activities that could be considered grounds for war."

Blasted by the press and Congress alike, the CIA ran for cover, first asserting Casey had indeed complied with the law and told the committee about the activities — though allowing the senators

to assume the contras were responsible — and then saying it was the Senate Intelligence Committee which had postponed briefings on the issue.

That's when the name of Robert R. Simmons began cropping up in the national press, Simmons clearly stating that it was the CIA which delayed the briefings, and calling Casey's protestations that he had kept the committee informed "disingenuous." Casey eventually apologized and the committee emerged in fine shape.

## Their Man in Tough Times

In their remarks Jan. 31, several senators made it clear that Simmons was their man in tough times. They mentioned his unfailing and nonpartisan fairness and "courage and dignity," plus a certain penchant for "blood and thunder."

At 42, Simmons has a voracious appetite for human events small and large, and an engaging humor that places them in lively perspective. His eager stream of conversation,

occasionally punctuated by full-length waves of the arms, is salted with a boyish sense of fun.

The senators noted some underlying rock-ribbed principles as well. Simmons said he never had a problem switching from Army intelligence officer to CIA agent to Senate staffer because "as a public servant you basically raise your right hand and swear to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America; there's only one flag."

In the army Simmons opted for training in military intelligence and subsequently spent a year and a half in Vietnam, leaving in 1968 with two bronze stars. He afterwards joined the CIA and was trained as a paramilitary of-